



# Corlann

The Future is Ours to Shape

## Policy on Relationships, Sexuality and Personal Development for People Supported

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**Signed:** Michael Hennessy, Chief Executive

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## Ethos

### **Rights :**

We view our role as supporting people to claim their rightful place as equal and valued citizens.

### **Dignity:**

We believe in the intrinsic value of each person and aim to further the dignity of all associated with our services.

### **Relationships:**

We want everyone associated with our services to enjoy dignifying relationships and a sense of community.

### **Learning:**

We are a learning organisation always open to evolving ideas in service provision.

### **Expertise:**

We value expertise in service provision and everyone we support has a right to a high standard of service.

### **Autonomy:**

We seek to empower the people we support to make decisions and to live the life of their choosing. We also support the maximum level of local autonomy and decision making in our organisation.

### **Partnerships:**

We work in partnership with statutory bodies and aim to be fully accountable for the services we provide.

### **BOC Ethos and Pastoral Care:**

In line with the Brothers of Charity ethos we value all the people we support and all who work with us. We support their right to fully participate in the cultural, spiritual and religious heritage to which they belong.

## 1.0 Introduction

Corlann endeavours to offer services/supports in local communities. This enables each person who is supported by our services to positively engage in the social and economic life of their local towns and villages and in doing so, develop a range of relationships than enhance their quality of life. Our responses are based on the recognition of each person (who is supported by our services) as an individual, an equal citizen with equal rights and an absolute respect of that status. We therefore, support each person to live their lives based on their own personal vision and choices, to identify and select their personal goals in life and to develop their personal plan to achieve those goals.

## 2.0 Policy Statement

It is the policy of Corlann to support each individual to live their 'best' life and to realise their full potential. This includes having opportunities for personal development as well as the enjoyment of fulfilling relationships. Corlann recognises the right of people supported to experience a full range of personal relationships based on their informed consent and their will and preference. We also recognise that people supported are sexual beings with sexual needs and that *'sexuality is an integral part of everyone's personality and includes cultural, psychological, ethical and biological dimensions'* (Bruess and Greenberg, 2004).

As a service provider Corlann:

- Respects each person's right to dignity and making their own decisions regarding personal relationships, consenting sexual relationships and engaging in sexual activity;
- Promotes the rights of people supported to explore their sexuality and maintain sexual and reproductive health;
- Provides education and information regarding the development and maintenance of relationships as well as sexual development and expression;
- Recognises that sexuality encompasses a person's gender identity, body image, sexual desires and experiences;
- Understands the importance of enabling people to manage and fulfil their sexual needs and expectations and to have access to appropriate supports and devices;
- Aims to promote a positive culture towards intimacy and sex where people supported can openly engage in conversations about this;
- Ensures the right to privacy;
- Supports individuals to be safe and to recognise unhealthy relationships as well as inappropriate and / or abusive behaviour;
- Ensures that the principle of consensual sexual relationships for people supported and their partners is understood.

## 3.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to empower staff to make sure that people supported are provided with every opportunity to live as normal a life as possible, a life of their choosing in line with their will and preference. This includes the provision of appropriate supports to build meaningful relationships as well as being recognised as a sexual being who wishes to engage in sexual

activities.

This policy focuses on the area of relationships, sexuality and personal development. Guidance relating to safeguarding is provided by the BOCSI National Policy and Procedures for the Safeguarding of Vulnerable Adults at Risk of Abuse, which is in keeping with the HSE's policy and procedures on Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults at Risk of Abuse, and the BOCSI National Policy and Procedures for the Welfare and Protection of Children.

## 4.0 Scope

This policy applies to persons aged 18 years and over who avail of support from Corlann. The policy equally applies to all staff, students and volunteers.

## 5.0 Legislation and Related Policies

- Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act, 2015
- Criminal Justice Act, 2006
- Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017
- Disability Act, 2005
- Guidance for Designated Centres: Intimacy and Sexual Relationships, HIQA 2014
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults at Risk of Abuse, HSE
- UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD), 2006
- BOCSI Code of Practice for all Persons who support Adults and Children using the Brothers of Charity Services
- BOCSI Confidentiality Policy
- BOCSI Intimate / Personal Care Policy
- BOCSI National Policy and Procedures for the Safeguarding of Vulnerable Adults at Risk of Abuse
- BOCSI National Policy and Procedures for the Welfare and Protection of Children
- BOCSI National Risk Management Policy and Procedures
- GDPR - In order to fulfil its obligations as a Service Provider Corlann is required to create and process records which hold both personal and sensitive data. These records are kept 'in confidence' and processed in strict accordance with the privacy and data protection rights of the individual. Corlann shares records only for the purpose of compliance with service delivery, health, and regulatory requirements. Data will be disclosed where required or authorised by law and in line with the General Data Protection Regulations

## 6.0 Glossary of Terms and Definitions

**Consent:** The HSE's National Consent Policy identifies consent as involving a process of communication where a person receives enough information to enable him or her to understand the request and the possible risks and benefits to a proposed action. Seeking consent is viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one-off event. For consent to be valid it must be given freely.

**External agencies:** an organisation that provides services to an organisation and influences

performance but does not control.

**Gender Identity:** describes how a person feels about their gender. For many people, their gender identity corresponds to the sex they were registered at birth. For others, it does not.

**LGBTQIA+:** stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer / questioning, intersex, asexual and the '+' represents other sexual orientations and gender identities.

**Masturbation:** the self-stimulation of the genitals to achieve sexual arousal and pleasure usually to the point of orgasm. This may include the use of sexual aids.

**Multidisciplinary team (MDT):** a group of health care workers who are members of different disciplines / professions with each providing specific services.

**Personal development:** the development of an individual's skills, competence, attributes and personality through education, training and other activities.

**Sexual aids:** sex aid (plural sex aids) is an object or piece of equipment that is designed to make sex easier or better.

**Sexual dysfunction:** refers to a problem that occurs during any phase of the sexual response cycle that prevents a person from experiencing satisfaction from a sexual activity.

**Sexual harassment:** Any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

**Sexual health:** is an important part of overall health. It means the absence of disease and infections but also covers well-being, the ability to control fertility and to have children and the ability to enjoy fulfilling relationships free from discrimination.

**Sexual identity:** describes the sex of a person, or people, a person is attracted to in a sexual or romantic way.

**Sexual orientation:** describes who a person is attracted to, whether it is people of the same sex, another sex or both.

**Sexuality:** a central aspect of being human throughout life encompassing sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.

**Sexually explicit material:** written graphic or verbal depictions of erotic subjects intended to arouse sexual excitement in the audience.

**Sexually transmitted infections (STIs):** infections spread predominantly by unprotected sexual contact. Some STIs can also be transmitted during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding and through infected blood or blood products.

**Social norms:** the perceived informal, mostly unwritten rules that define acceptable and appropriate actions within a given group or community, thus guiding human behaviour.

**Staff:** includes all persons paid and unpaid who support people accessing our services.

## 7.0 Roles, Responsibilities and Dissemination of this Policy

- 7.1 Corlann will ensure that all staff are provided with relevant information as well as ongoing training and support and supervision so that the individuals accessing our services are supported regarding their personal development, relationships and sexuality. Corlann aims to create a supportive environment where people accessing our services have the choice to develop friendships, intimate relationships, get married and have a family. (Human Rights Charter: National Advocacy Council, 2021).
- 7.2 Relationships and sexuality training programmes will be provided to people supported and to staff. The training will be tailored to meet the needs and abilities of people supported - in an individual or group setting. Management must ensure that staff have the skills and experience necessary to facilitate this training.
- 7.3 All staff, including multidisciplinary team members (MDT), will support individuals and their family members as appropriate, to be informed about the contents of this policy and / or the education and training programmes on personal development, relationships and sexuality that are provided.
- 7.4 Managers and Team Leaders at all levels of the organisation should actively support the implementation of this policy. This includes facilitating discussion at all available forums including induction, team meetings, training days, support and supervision etc.
- 7.5 Staff need to be aware of the contents of this policy and how it might impact their day-to-day practice when supporting individuals who use services. It is the responsibility of all staff to ensure they have the knowledge and practical skills to deliver the required information and support to individuals accessing our supports and services.
- 7.6 Staff should not work in isolation and should consult with the relevant professionals and support services when addressing any issues that may arise when supporting the personal development, relationships and sexuality of the people they are supporting.

## 8.0 Guidelines and Procedures

### 8.1 Guiding Principles

- 8.1.1 People supported should be treated with the upmost dignity and respect in line with the core values of Corlann and the HSE Promoting Healthy Relationships and Sexuality (PHRAS) Principles Document 2025 (Appendix 1). A positive and open environment should be maintained regarding issues related to self-image, interpersonal skills, relationships, sexuality and intimacy.
- 8.1.2. Relationship and sexuality matters that naturally arise should be addressed in an open and sensitive manner. The communication style used should be suitable for the level of understanding of the person supported.
- 8.1.3 Opportunities to form and maintain friendships should be encouraged and created in order to prevent loneliness and isolation. Skills training around building and maintaining friendships should also be delivered if required.
- 8.1.4 Any information provided to people supported must consider their level of understanding,

experience, age, sexual orientation and individual preferences.

- 8.1.5 Training and support must be provided to people supported regarding decision making and making informed choices in relation to their relationships, sexuality and personal development. Training should also be provided to staff on how best to facilitate this.
- 8.1.6 People supported are presumed to have the capacity to make their own decisions in line with the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act, 2015. An individual's will and preference is priority and central to the supports they receive regarding personal development, relationships and sexuality. If this is in conflict with their families' wishes, information and support should be offered to the person supported.
- 8.1.7 Staff should be aware of their professional boundaries when providing information or advice to people supported or their families. Staff should contact MDT where specialised advice or information is required.
- 8.1.8 The organisations Policy on Confidentiality must be observed. The consent of people supported must be obtained when seeking external professional advice or support and, when requested anonymity should be maintained.
- 8.1.9 If there is a concern regarding a potential threat or risk of sexual exploitation an appropriate risk assessment should be completed with relevant MDT members
- 8.1.10 Opportunities to create and maintain positive relationships in people's lives should be encouraged and facilitated by all staff within the organisation. Staff need to be familiar with how each individual they support communicates their preferences.
- 8.1.11 Couples who want to experience a more intimate relationship, including people supported in residential services, should be supported in accordance with their wishes.

## 8.2 Consent

In line with the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act, 2015 individual capacity regarding decision making is assumed.

- 8.2.1 It is important to distinguish between informed consent and saying "yes". People supported may be influenced to agree to suggestions that are not in line with their individual will and preference.
- 8.2.2 Whilst capacity is assumed there may be situations where an individual may be able to give informed consent on some sexual issues but not on others- depending on the complexity of the issues involved.
- 8.2.3 If a concern arises around a person's capacity to consent - this should be considered on an individual basis by the individuals wider support team.

## 8.3 Interventions

Corlann recognises that in daily interactions with people supported, their families and staff members, interventions may be required to:

- 8.3.1 Create a supportive, social environment that encourages the development and nurturing of positive interpersonal relationships.
- 8.3.2 Respond to requests for support and / or information on managing any difficulties arising from

personal, social and / or sexual needs e.g. sexual dysfunction.

8.3.3 Deliver relationships, sexuality and personal development training for people supported which:

- Provide appropriate information in an accessible way about relationships, boundaries, intimacy, consent, masturbation, sex, pregnancy, contraception, sexuality and sexual identity
- Facilitate individuals to express and discuss their views, beliefs and experiences
- Diffuse any misinformation or negative preconceptions around sexuality and persons supported expressing their sexuality
- Identify and facilitate access to professional services that promote sexual health e.g. clinics for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), gynaecological services, family planning etc.
- Provide opportunities for people supported to explore and understand any emerging issues relating to their sexuality.

8.3.4 Design strategies, in consultation with the MDT, to respond to significant issues arising from any inappropriate sexual behaviour of people supported.

8.3.5 Any safeguarding concerns will be informed by the National Policy and Procedures for the Safeguarding of Vulnerable Adults at Risk of Abuse.

## 8.4 Aims of the Corlann Education and Training Programmes

8.4.1 People supported by our organisation have the right to develop friendships, to get married and to have a family (Human Rights Charter: National Advocacy Council, 2021). Corlann is committed to upholding this right by providing appropriate and ongoing information and education to people supported on making and developing adult relationships in a person-centred way. Educational materials must be accessible using language, easy read materials, activities and videos etc. that are suitable to the learning needs of the people supported. Appropriate training and support systems relating to specific skills, policies, materials and professional resources must also be provided, as required, for staff members.

8.4.2 People supported should have access to a variety of supports and training programmes in a modular format- appropriate to their individual needs and level of understanding. This can include:

- Universal targeted workshops aimed at providing more general information on particular topics / issues to a number of people e.g. contraception
- An exploration of social norms regarding sexual expression and activity
- The development of individualised Personal Development plans for specific support needs e.g. sharing sexual orientation.

8.4.3 The aims of Corlann's education and training programmes on personal development, relations and sexuality are to:

- Provide opportunities to people supported to learn about their rights and responsibilities regarding their physical, emotional and social development.
- Recognise and support each person's right to their personal identity and to develop relationships of their choice, whilst also understanding that not all relationships that people have are healthy ones.

- Enable individuals to recognise and respond to situations where they may be exploited or abused.
- Provide training and information on the use of social media, and other online forums so that people are supported to form relationships safely.
- Enable individuals to understand the principles of consent and how to express their rights and expectations whilst also accepting the rights of others.
- Provide information on the responsibilities inherent within relationships e.g. having children, co-habiting, marriage etc. and enable people supported to understand the difference between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships.
- Facilitate open discussions regarding relationships and sexuality within a supportive environment.
- Encourage individuals to take responsibility for their own sexual health and how best to protect both themselves and their partners.
- Promote access to counselling and other support services as required.

## 8.5 Marriage, Cohabitation, Pregnancy and Parenthood

- 8.5.1 Corlann recognises the rights of people supported to have active sexual relationships, to marry, to cohabit, and to have children.
- 8.5.2 The organisation will explore people's understanding and expectations of these roles and will provide individualised supports and education to enable people supported to build the required skills.
- 8.5.3 Providing appropriate supports to individuals who wish to marry, to cohabit and / or to have children requires a comprehensive exploration of their understanding and expectations of these different life stages.
- 8.5.4 The organisation is guided by current legislation regarding practice in this area and recognizes that decision making is contingent on '*the ability to understand the nature and consequence of a decision in the context of available choices at the time the decision is to be made and to communicate that decision*'. Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act, 2015.
- 8.5.5 The MDT and frontline staff will work with the person supported to navigate through these life stages. This includes accessing the relevant legal and financial expertise and providing information on the emotional, legal and financial consequences of relationship breakdown.
- 8.5.6 Where a couple marries or cohabits, supports and services will continue to be delivered in line with their needs and wants, in consultation with any other service providers that are involved.
- 8.5.7 In the event that a married or cohabiting couple that are accessing our service cannot be accommodated within existing residential services, every effort will be made to support them to acquire appropriate living accommodation through links with external agencies / housing bodies etc.
- 8.5.8 In the event of pregnancy Corlann will support the individual concerned and facilitate the mother,

and the father as appropriate, to access a range of professional supports such as termination of pregnancy, prenatal, postnatal services etc.

## **8.6 Contraception**

- 8.6.1 People supported can approach staff to discuss contraception. A staff member can instigate a conversation on contraception if they deem it is appropriate to the individual circumstance(s) of the person supported.
- 8.6.2 All discussions and potential decisions in relation to contraception will be supported and explored on a case-by-case basis. The individual supported will determine who needs to be included in the discussion(s).
- 8.6.3 All individuals supported can participate in a training programme on personal development, relationships and sexuality that will include information on contraception.
- 8.6.4 Staff should support people to avail of accessible information and advice from relevant professional support / health services. Professional advice must always be sought where contraceptives of a medical nature are under consideration.
- 8.6.5 Some individuals will require assistance to support their use of a contraceptive. A staff member's personal or moral convictions must not preclude them from supporting this.

## **8.7 Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation**

Individuals supported by the services should be fully supported around the area of gender identity and sexual orientation:

- 8.7.1 Where individuals are making decisions as consenting adults, they should not to be stigmatised or discriminated against because of their sexual orientation and should be treated with the utmost respect.
- 8.7.2 At all times the impact of the individual's disability regarding full knowledge and consent should be taken account of.
- 8.7.3 It may be appropriate to link individuals with LGBTQIA+ and any other relevant support and advice services.

## **8.8 Masturbation**

Corlann recognises that masturbation occurs as an expression of sexual behaviour.

- 8.8.1 People supported can be provided with accessible information about masturbation and should be supported to access a training programme on personal development, relationships and sexuality.
- 8.8.2 People supported have the right to privacy in relation to masturbation. They may be using a variety of aids, appliances, videos etc. and therefore there should be the least possible invasion of their privacy.
- 8.8.3 Individuals should be supported to understand that masturbation in a public place is socially and legally unacceptable behaviour.
- 8.8.4 People supported with high support needs and / or physical difficulties may need specific support in relation to masturbation. This is a matter that should be addressed with the MDT

## 8.9 Sexually Explicit Material

Some sexually explicit materials are legal and are available to the public to anyone over the age of eighteen. The following is advised in relation to sexually explicit material:

- 8.9.1 When the material is legal and used in private, people supported have a right to look at what they choose. They do not have the right to infringe on the privacy or rights of others who do not wish to view such materials.
- 8.9.2 Concerns about the legality of the material e.g. child abuse images must be brought to the attention of management. Concerns also need to be considered in consultation with MDT including the Designated Officer. Under the Children's First Act, 2015 material that is illegal must be reported to An Garda Síochána and TUSLA.
- 8.9.3 Staff will support individuals to purchase sexual aids and materials as required. Requests for more specialised aids and materials can be discussed with the relevant MDT and considered on an individual basis.

## 8.10 Sexual Health

Sexual health is an important part of overall health. People supported should have the knowledge, skills and ability to make informed choices to protect their sexual health and that of others. This includes the use of contraceptives to avoid unplanned pregnancies and preventing sexual transmitted infections (STIs).

## 8.11 Sharing of Information

- 8.11.1 People supported must be informed, if and why, issues relevant to them regarding their personal development, relationship or sexuality are discussed with the team. The person supported has the right to be present at such a meeting if they so choose.
- 8.11.2 Where information relating to a person supported needs to be shared within the wider organisation and / or external agencies, the person will be informed of this and, as appropriate, the reasons for it.

## 8.12 Relationships between Staff and Individuals Supported by the Service

- 8.12.1 Corlann values meaningful personal relationships between people supported and staff members. However, staff must always be mindful of the standards of professional boundaries and respect the dignity of all concerned.
- 8.12.2 It is never appropriate for staff to discuss their sexual practices and preferences with the people they support.
- 8.12.3 Sexual relationships between staff members and individuals supported are illegal.
- 8.12.4 Any concerns regarding sexual harassment, by either a member of staff or a person supported, should be reported immediately and dealt with through the appropriate organisational policies and procedures.

## 9.0 Revision and Audit

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless significant changes in international best practice or legislation identifies the need to update it at an earlier date.

## 10.0 References

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<https://www.brothersofcharity.ie/pdfs/Charteredit2.pdf>
- Personal Development, Relationships and Staying Safe, A training pack for staff supporting adults with intellectual disabilities, high support and complex needs. By Marie Walsh, By Geraldine Cregg. (Galway)
- Raising Understanding and Awareness (RUA), Callan Institute for Positive Behaviour in association  
<https://www.callaninstitute.org/Practice%20Certificate%20in%20RUA>
- Relationship & Sexuality Programme, National Institute of Intellectual Disability Studies,  
<https://niids.myvcampus.com/product-category/all-courses/relationships-and-sexuality-programme/>
- Relationship & Sexuality Training (Jim Gogarty)
- Speakeasy Plus, Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA).  
<https://www.ifpa.ie/education/speakeasy-plus/>
- The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS®)
- WHO, 2006. World Health Organization, Sexual and reproductive health, Defining Sexual Health
- Promoting Healthy Relationships and Sexuality (PHRAS) Principles Version 1 HSE 2025,  
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/disability-quality-improvement/national-frameworks-and-policies/>

## Appendix 1. Principles for Promoting Healthy Relationships and Sexuality for Disabled People in Ireland

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/disability-quality-improvement/national-frameworks-and-policies/>

# HEARTS

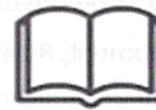
## Principles for Promoting Healthy Relationships and Sexuality for Disabled People in Ireland



**Human Rights**



**Education  
(Person & Supporters)**



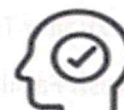
**Autonomy**



**Respect for  
Consent**



**Thoughtful Choice/  
Decision Making**



**Support  
through Access**

